

U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY  
POLLUTION/SITUATION REPORT  
Camras School Mercury Spill - Removal Polrep  
Initial Removal Polrep



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY  
Region V

**Subject:** POLREP #1  
Initial  
Camras School Mercury Spill  
  
Chicago, IL  
Latitude: 41.9353512 Longitude: -87.7704031

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**From:** Kristina Miller, Ramon Mendoza, Dan Haag, On-Scene Coordinators  
**Date:** 3/30/2019  
**Reporting Period:** 3/26/19-3/29/19

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

<b>Site Number:</b>	C5NU	<b>Contract Number:</b>	
<b>D.O. Number:</b>		<b>Action Memo Date:</b>	
<b>Response Authority:</b>	CERCLA	<b>Response Type:</b>	Emergency
<b>Response Lead:</b>	PRP	<b>Incident Category:</b>	Removal Action
<b>NPL Status:</b>	Non NPL	<b>Operable Unit:</b>	
<b>Mobilization Date:</b>	3/26/2019	<b>Start Date:</b>	3/26/2019
<b>Demob Date:</b>		<b>Completion Date:</b>	
<b>CERCLIS ID:</b>		<b>RCRIS ID:</b>	
<b>ERNS No.:</b>		<b>State Notification:</b>	
<b>FPN#:</b>		<b>Reimbursable Account #:</b>	

#### 1.1.1 Incident Category

Emergency response

#### 1.1.2 Site Description

On 3/26/19, students at Marvin Camras Elementary School in Chicago, IL were discovered playing with a bag of elemental mercury. The source of the mercury was tracked back to a barometer in a science room. Several hours elapsed between the time of the spill and the time that it was discovered by teachers. By the time it was discovered, the students had traveled throughout the school with the mercury and handled it in several rooms. It is also believed that the students may have taken it outside to the playground area. The highly impacted areas include the classroom adjoining the location of the barometer (room 211), the cafeteria, 318D and 309. Additional classrooms with moderate impact include 213 and 318C.

##### 1.1.2.1 Location

The mercury was spilled at the Marvin Camras Elementary School. Camras Elementary is a Chicago Public School (CPS) and has students from kindergarten thru 8th grade. The school is located at 3000 N. Mango St., Chicago, IL. The school has three main floors and a basement.

##### 1.1.2.2 Description of Threat

The spill is at an elementary school, with grades kindergarten through 8th grade. The school has approximately 900 students.

Upon initial inspection of room 211, visible mercury beads were present on the floor near the location of the barometer. The Chicago Fire Department conducted a limited cleanup of some spilled mercury beads at

the school.

The spilled mercury presents a risk of release to the environment by tracking on shoes and other personal items within the school. It was also reported by the schools that the students may have taken the mercury out to the playground.

### **1.1.3 Preliminary Removal Assessment/Removal Site Inspection Results**

Upon initial inspection by EPA and START, visible mercury beads were seen on the ground in the room with the barometer.

EPA utilized the Lumex to conduct a screening of the school to determine the extent of contamination. During the initial inspection, EPA found several areas with elevated levels of mercury. The highly impacted areas include the classroom adjoining the location of the barometer (room 211), the cafeteria, 318D and 309. Additional classrooms with moderate impact include 213 and 318C.

## **2. Current Activities**

### **2.1 Operations Section**

#### **2.1.1 Narrative**

#### **2.1.2 Response Actions to Date**

3/26/19:

On the afternoon of 3/26/19, teachers at Camras Elementary school, a Chicago Public School, noticed that a number of students were playing with a ziplock baggie full of mercury. Officials at the school took the bag of mercury and started interviewing the students involved. Officials determined that the spill likely occurred earlier that morning around 11 and began back tracking to determine where the affected students and the mercury had been. The source was a barometer in classroom 211. Officials compiled a list of 8th grade students that they believe came in contact with the mercury.

CPS notified the Chicago Fire Department (CFD) of the spill and emergency officials responded. The hazmat team responded with a Jerome to conduct screening. Affected students and staff were staged temporarily while the fire department conducted an assessment of the situation. CFD assessed students and sent them home with their parents. Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) responded to the scene as well.

At approximately 2000 CST on 3/26/19, CPS filed an NRC report (#1241158) reporting the spill. CPS requested U.S. EPA assistance with the spill and OSC Miller dispatched to the scene with START. Upon arriving at the site, EPA met with representatives from CPS and CDPH. EPA screened shoes, booties, and personal items of staff still at the school prior to them leaving the building.

It was determined that school would be closed the following day (3/27) and that CPS would operate under a contingency plan where students would still meet in the school parking lot and would be walked over to two schools nearby.

3/27/19:

Overnight into 3/27/19, EPA and START began an assessment of the school using a Lumex. EPA started screening floors and breathing space areas to determine the extent of contamination in the building. EPA and START entered the room where the barometer was located. Visible mercury beads were present on the tile floor near the location of the barometer. Breathing space readings in the room exceeded 1,000 ng/m<sup>3</sup>. The windows in the classroom had been open since earlier in the evening to ventilate. EPA also entered several other classrooms overnight, showing elevated readings of mercury vapors.

The morning of 3/27/19, CPS hired SET Environmental to conduct the remediation work at the school. SET arrived on site and began conducting remediation work in the highly impacted areas. This remediation work included vacuuming of visible mercury beads, washing, and heating and venting. SET also began bagging up items to screen them.

On 3/27/19, CDPH, in consultation with ATSDR, established a clearance level of 1,000 ng/m<sup>3</sup> for a child's breathing zone (0-3 feet). The clearance screenings are to be conducted with a Lumex by U.S. EPA.

Before school on 3/27/19, EPA screened shoes and personal belongings of 26 students. CPS compiled the list of students that came in contact with the mercury and gave permission for the screening activities. From these readings, several personal items with elevated readings were collected and bagged. 4 students had items with readings above 10,000 ng/m<sup>3</sup>, which were listed as the highest priority homes to visit. 11 more students had items with elevated readings and were also prioritized for home visits. CPS facilitated discussion with parents and setting up appointments. Later in the day, EPA and CDPH began visiting the homes. 3 of the 4 homes of students with items exceeding 10,000 ng/m<sup>3</sup> were visited on 3/27/19 (the fourth was not available until the following day). During these visits, EPA collected personal items with elevated levels but the rest of the homes did not exceed screening levels requiring a cleanup.

Through the day and into overnight into 3/28, EPA continued the building assessment. Breathing space readings within a 0-3 foot range (breathing space for a small child) were collected throughout the school, avoiding highly impacted areas where work was already being conducted by contractors since visible mercury had already been observed in that area.

3/28/19:

On 3/28/19, EPA continued assessment work at the school. Based on information from CPS, it was believed that children may have taken the mercury out to the playground with them. EPA began assessing the playground equipment and the ground in the entire enclosed play area.

EPA continued residential assessments. CDPH accompanied EPA to visit homes and interview residents. EPA continued to collect personal items that exceeded screening levels for heating and venting and/or disposal. During visits on 3/28/19, no residences had elevated levels in breathing spaces or required any cleanup actions. EPA also continued to scan, heat and vent personal items that had already been collected.

CPS's contractor continued remediation activities in the school. They continued to use mercury vacuums, conduct washes, and bag items for later screening.

The school remained closed and under the contingency plan on 3/28.

3/29/19:

On 3/29/19, EPA and START activities focused on screening. EPA began screening lockers, beginning with students that were primarily in contact with the mercury. EPA also continued assessment of the playground area.

After school, CPS hosted a parent meeting to answer questions regarding what had happened the day of the spill, health concerns, and cleanup activities. The panel at the meeting included CPS, CDPH, EPA, and CFD. Parents were able to ask questions during the meeting and one on one after. EPA also screened personal items of students in tents outside of the gym during the meeting. Approximately 70 people attended the meeting. The meeting was also translated live through headsets for Spanish speakers.

After the parent meeting, EPA and CDPH visited another student's home whose personal item exceeded 20,000 ng/m3 during the screening. Some additional personal items were removed from the home for heating and venting and/or disposal. Out of an abundance of caution, EPA also visited a second home of a student that did not show any signs of elevated readings.

The school remained closed and under the contingency plan on 3/29.

#### 2.1.3 Enforcement Activities, Identity of Potentially Responsible Parties (PRPs)

The spill occurred at a Chicago Public School. CPS has hired a contractor to conduct mercury remediation at the school.

#### 2.1.4 Progress Metrics

<i>Waste Stream</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Manifest #</i>	<i>Treatment</i>	<i>Disposal</i>

### 2.2 Planning Section

#### 2.2.1 Anticipated Activities

##### 2.2.1.1 Planned Response Activities

During the next reporting period, remediation activities will continue at the site. Crews will continue to work on many highly impacted areas of the site. It is expected by the end of the weekend that clearance screening may begin.

EPA aims to have locker and the playground screenings completed by the end of the weekend (3/31). EPA also plans to focus on personal belongings collected and determining which items can be returned to owners. EPA will also continue supporting cleanup activities, providing technical support to CPS, and coordinating with CDPH.

##### 2.2.1.2 Next Steps

A determination will be made on a conference call on 3/31 to determine if school will be open on 4/1/19.

#### 2.2.2 Issues

### 2.3 Logistics Section

No information available at this time.

### 2.4 Finance Section

#### Estimated Costs \*

	<b>Budgeted</b>	<b>Total To Date</b>	<b>Remaining</b>	<b>% Remaining</b>
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NON-RESPONSIVE

\* The above accounting of expenditures is an estimate based on figures known to the OSC at the time this report was written. The OSC does not necessarily receive specific figures on final payments made to any contractor(s). Other financial data which the OSC must rely upon may not be entirely up-to-date. The cost accounting provided in this report does not necessarily represent an exact monetary figure which the government may include in any claim for cost recovery.

### 2.5 Other Command Staff

#### 2.5.1 Safety Officer

OSCs are serving this role

#### **2.5.2 Liaison Officer**

OSCs are serving this role.

#### **2.5.3 Information Officer**

The EPA Region 5 public affairs office has been supporting press support

### **3. Participating Entities**

#### **3.1 Unified Command**

#### **3.2 Cooperating Agencies**

Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH)

Chicago Public Schools (CPS)

Chicago Fire Department (CFD)

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR)

### **4. Personnel On Site**

#### 3/26/19:

EPA: 1

START: 2

CDPH: 1

CPS: multiple

#### 3/27/19:

EPA: 2

START: 4

CDPH: 2

CPS and contractors: multiple

#### 3/28/19:

EPA: 3

START: 5

CDPH: 2

CPS and contractors: multiple

#### 3/29/19:

EPA: 3

START: 6

CDPH: 2

CPS and contractors: multiple

### **5. Definition of Terms**

ATSDR	Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry
CDPH	Chicago Department of Public Health
CERCLA	Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act
CFD	Chicago Fire Department
CPS	Chicago Public Schools
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
NRC	National Response Center
OSC	On-Scene Coordinator
PRP	Potentially Responsible Party
START	Superfund Technical Assessment & Response Team Contractor

### **6. Additional sources of information**

#### **6.1 Internet location of additional information/report**

#### **6.2 Reporting Schedule**

POLREPS will be issued as work at the site progresses

### **7. Situational Reference Materials**

No information available at this time.